



Investigating Factors that Influence the Belief in and Sharing of Social Media News as well as the Attitudes toward Fake News of Selected Filipinos

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ABSTRACT:

This study sought to investigate certain factors that could contribute to the spread of fake news. A 49-item, researcher-made instrument, which underwent content validation was used in this study. The instrument used a 4-point Likert scale. This instrument was posted online through Google Forms and volunteers were obtained as respondents. The respondents were all adults who use social media and reside in Quezon City, Pasig City and Marikina City as well as from San Mateo and Rodriguez in the Province of Rizal. There were 52 males and 125 females, totaling 177 participants. The results indicate that the respondents have encountered fake news on Facebook, Youtube and Tiktok. The results also show that the respondents do not consider the number of likes, positive comments or shares as indicative of the truth of the social media content. It was also found that the direct sharer such as a family member, a relative, a present or former classmate, a friend, a present or former coworker, a teacher, a job superior, a romantic partner, a fellow church member or church leader, a former school mate and a fellow member of an organization to which they belong, is not a factor that will move them to share the social media news. The respondents also do not immediately believe the truth of a photo or the identity of the individual posting social media content. The results also suggest that the respondents exercise critical thinking practices prior to believing any social media content. The results further show that the respondents do not believe that they have intentionally or accidentally shared any fake news.

INTRODUCTION

Disinformation and hoaxes that are generally referred to as “fake news” are accelerating and affecting the way people interpret daily events ^[1]. Fake news as a means of misinformation is aided by the fast pace that information travels in the present media ecosystem, specifically across social media platforms ^[2]. Fake news stories are invented, with no verifiable evidences, sources or quotes. Occasionally these stories may be propaganda designed to deceive the reader. Some stories may possess some truth, but contextualizing details may be absent ^[3]. Many peddlers of fake news are not reluctant to generate fake accounts and post false or misleading information online ^[4]. Social media are digital platforms that can be an advantage or a blight to the people and societies in general. They are means whereby information or misinformation can be circulated. And given the swiftness by which these can spread true or fake news, the stakes are high ^[5].

A study has classified fake news as false news, polarized content, satire, misreporting, commentary, persuasive information, and citizen journalism ^[6]. Another research claimed that false news stories are 70 percent more likely to be retweeted than true stories ^[7]. In another study, it was found that the instantaneous sharing of news motivated by the desire to create awareness may also facilitate the sharing of fake news perhaps due to the lack of time to verify the same ^[8]. Furthermore, a research revealed that participants had shared news before evaluating the validity of the information ^[9]. Another study found that heightened emotionality at the beginning was predictive of greater belief in fake (but not true) news posts ^[10]. There is a substantial disparity between what people believe and what they will share on social media, and this is mostly driven by inattention rather than by intentional sharing of misinformation ^[11]. Individuals often look for, remember and understand information that confirms what they already believe. Bots have been found to encourage confirmation biases by limiting information to certain individuals. And this amplifies polarization of beliefs ^[12].

In the Philippines, 51% of Filipinos find it difficult to identify fake news on television, radio, or social media ^[13]. Most Filipino adults believed fake news in media is a grave issue ^[14].

This study sought to investigate what factors contribute to the belief in and sharing of social media news by selected Filipinos, which may lead to the spread of fake news. It also attempted to compare male and female responses.

METHODOLOGY

A 49-item, researcher-made instrument, which underwent content validation was used in this study. The instrument used a 4-point Likert scale. The items attempted to measure (1) respondents' understanding of what fake news is, (2) social media platforms where respondents encountered fake news, (3) basis for respondents believing news on social media, (4) sharer of news on social media as basis for further sharing, (5) respondents' perception of credibility of photos or identity of individuals on social media, (6) respondents' exercise of critical thinking about news on social media, (7) respondents' perception of who can be harmed by fake news and (8) respondents' intentional or unintentional sharing of fake news.

This instrument was posted online through Google Forms. The respondents were all adults who use social media and reside in Quezon City, Pasig City and Marikina City as well as from San Mateo and Rodriguez in the Province of Rizal. There were 52 males and 125 females, totaling 177 participants. Their mean age was 21.90. Their identities were not obtained.

RESULTS

The following tables show the weighted means of the responses to each item of the researcher-made questionnaire. The responses of males and females are separate for comparison. Table 1 shows the verbal interpretation scale used to give meaning to the scores.

Table 1
Scale of Verbal Interpretation

Strongly Disagree	1.00 - 1.75
Disagree	1.76 - 2.50
Agree	2.51 - 3.25
Strongly Agree	3.26 - 4.00

Table 2
Respondents' Understanding of what Fake News is

Statement	Male Weighted Mean (N=52)	Female Weighted Mean (N= 125)	Item Weighted Mean (N=177)
1. I believe that fake news is false information that is spread accidentally by those who think it is true.	3.153846154 Agree	3.136 Agree	3.141242938 Agree
2. I believe that fake news is false information that is spread intentionally by those who have malicious intentions.	3.307692308 Strongly Agree	3.576 Strongly Agree	3.497175141 Strongly Agree
3. I believe that fake news is true information but taken out of context or highlighted to create a different story.	2.557692308 Agree	2.664 Agree	2.632768362 Agree

Table 3
Social Media Platforms where Respondents Encountered Fake News

Statement	Male Weighted Mean (N=52)	Female Weighted Mean (N= 125)	Item Weighted Mean (N=177)
4. I have encountered fake news in Facebook.	3.307692308 Strongly Agree	3.64 Strongly Agree	3.542372881 Strongly Agree
5. I have encountered fake news in Youtube.	3.096153846 Agree	3.424 Strongly Agree	3.327683616 Strongly Agree
6. I have encountered fake news in Twitter.	1.980769231 Disagree	2.568 Agree	2.395480226 Disagree
7. I have encountered fake news in Tiktok.	3.038461538 Agree	3.192 Agree	3.146892655 Agree
8. I have encountered fake news in Instagram.	2.019230769 Disagree	2.464 Disagree	2.333333333 Disagree

Table 4
Basis for Respondents Believing News on Social Media

Statement	Male Weighted Mean (N=52)	Female Weighted Mean (N= 125)	Item Weighted Mean (N=177)
9. I know the news on social media is real and not fake because it has many likes.	1.961538462 Disagree	1.688 Strongly Disagree	1.768361582 Disagree
10. I know the news on social media is real and not fake because it has many shares.	1.826923077 Disagree	1.672 Strongly Disagree	1.717514124 Strongly Disagree
11. I know the news on social media is real and not fake because it has many comments that agree with it.	2.115384615 Disagree	1.832 Disagree	1.915254237 Disagree

Table 5
Sharer of News on Social Media as Basis for Further Sharing

Statement	Male Weighted Mean (N=52)	Female Weighted Mean (N= 125)	Item Weighted Mean (N=177)
12. I share news I see on social media when it was shared to me by a family member.	2.134615385 Disagree	1.912 Disagree	1.97740113 Disagree
13. I share news I see on social media when it was shared to me by a relative.	1.961538462 Disagree	1.816 Disagree	1.858757062 Disagree
14. I share news I see on social media when it was shared to me by a present or former classmate.	2.057692308 Disagree	1.856 Disagree	1.915254237 Disagree
15. I share news I see on social media when it was shared to me by a friend.	2.134615385 Disagree	1.928 Disagree	1.988700565 Disagree
16. I share news I see on social media when it was shared to me by a present or former coworker.	2.000000000 Disagree	1.784 Disagree	1.847457627 Disagree

17. I share news I see on social media when it was shared to me by a teacher.	2.230769231 Disagree	2.264 Disagree	2.254237288 Disagree
18. I share news I see on social media when it was shared to me by a job superior (boss).	2.115384615 Disagree	1.992 Disagree	2.028248588 Disagree
19. I share news I see on social media when it was shared to me by my romantic partner.	2.038461538 Disagree	1.888 Disagree	1.93220339 Disagree
20. I share news I see on social media when it was shared to me by a fellow church member or church leader.	2.134615385 Disagree	2.008 Disagree	2.04519774 Disagree
21. I share news I see on social media when it was shared to me by a former schoolmate	2.019230769 Disagree	1.872 Disagree	1.915254237 Disagree
22. I share news I see on social media when it was shared to me by fellow members of an organization, I am in.	2.076923077 Disagree	1.984 Disagree	2.011299435 Disagree
23. I share news I see on social media when it was shared to me by people who have similar political or social beliefs as mine.	2.288461538 Disagree	2.24 Disagree	2.254237288 Disagree

Table 6
Respondents' Perception of Credibility of Photos or Identity of Individuals on Social Media

Statement	Male Weighted Mean (N=52)	Female Weighted Mean (N= 125)	Item Weighted Mean (N=177)
24. When I see a photo and information about its caption, I believe it is true without considering that it was edited.	1.865384615 Disagree	1.768 Disagree	1.796610169 Disagree
25. When I see a stranger (someone I don't personally know) posting any news on social media, I believe that the individual, his/her name and photo are real.	2.019230769 Disagree	1.856 Disagree	1.903954802 Disagree

Table 7
Respondents' Exercise of Critical Thinking about News on Social Media

Statement	Male Weighted Mean (N=52)	Female Weighted Mean (N= 125)	Item Weighted Mean (N=177)
26. Before I believe any news on social media, I check the reputation of the website or source.	3.403846154 Strongly Agree	3.592 Strongly Agree	3.536723164 Strongly Agree
27. Before I believe any news on social media, I use search engines to see if other websites are announcing the same news.	3.269230769 Strongly Agree	3.544 Strongly Agree	3.463276836 Strongly Agree
28. Before I believe any news on social media, I ask myself whether it is trying to convince me to change my beliefs or behavior.	2.903846154 Agree	3.032 Agree	2.994350282 Agree
29. Before I believe any news on social media, I make sure that the person is an expert and an authority on the topic of the news.	3.307692308 Strongly Agree	3.504 Strongly Agree	3.446327684 Strongly Agree
30. Before I believe any news on social media, I consider the evidence being presented by the news.	3.326923077 Strongly Agree	3.568 Strongly Agree	3.497175141 Strongly Agree
31. Before I believe any news on social media, I consider whether the news has eye witnesses.	3.211538462 Agree	3.232 Agree	3.225988701 Agree
32. Before I believe any news on social media, I consider whether experts are being quoted by the news.	3.230769231 Agree	3.248 Agree	3.242937853 Agree
33. Before I believe any news on social media, I consider whether statistical data is presented by the news.	3.173076923 Agree	3.352 Strongly Agree	3.299435028 Strongly Agree
34. Before I believe any news on social media, I ask myself whether it was made by a troll (a troll is a professional paid to spread fake news).	3.134615385 Agree	3.376 Strongly Agree	3.305084746 Strongly Agree

35. Before I believe any news on social media, I ask myself whether it was made by a bot (a bot is program that pretends to be human and spreads, likes, shares fake news).	3.153846154 Agree	3.16 Agree	3.15819209 Agree
36. Before I believe any news on social media, I check whether it is updated news or old news already.	3.346153846 Strongly Agree	3.52 Strongly Agree	3.468926554 Strongly Agree
37. Before I believe any news on social media, I think about it whether the news makes sense or is logical.	3.057692308 Agree	3.392 Strongly Agree	3.293785311 Strongly Agree
38. Before I believe any news on social media, I ask myself whether I am biased in favor of the news which might make me believe it even though it is fake.	3.115384615 Agree	3.04 Agree	3.062146893 Agree
39. Before I believe any news on social media, I go to a "fact checking" website to see if the news is indeed true.	3.25 Agree	3.408 Strongly Agree	3.361581921 Strongly Agree

Table 8
Respondents' Perception of Who can be Harmed by Fake News

Statement	Male Weighted Mean (N=52)	Female Weighted Mean (N= 125)	Item Weighted Mean (N=177)
40. Fake news can cause harm to me.	3.423076923 Strongly Agree	3.536 Strongly Agree	3.502824859 Strongly Agree
41. Fake news can cause harm to my family.	3.480769231 Strongly Agree	3.592 Strongly Agree	3.559322034 Strongly Agree
42. Fake news can harm my community.	3.461538462 Strongly Agree	3.704 Strongly Agree	3.632768362 Strongly Agree

43. Fake news can harm a large sector of society.	3.576923077 Strongly Agree	3.776 Strongly Agree	3.717514124 Strongly Agree
44. Fake news can harm my country.	3.538461538 Strongly Agree	3.736 Strongly Agree	3.677966102 Strongly Agree
45. Fake news can harm the world.	3.519230769 Strongly Agree	3.744 Strongly Agree	3.677966102 Strongly Agree
46. Fake news can only harm those who believe it.	2.730769231 Agree	2.576 Agree	2.621468927 Agree

Table 9
Respondents' Intentional or Unintentional Sharing of Fake News

Statement	Male Weighted Mean (N=52)	Female Weighted Mean (N= 125)	Item Weighted Mean (N=177)
47. I may have shared fake news without my knowledge.	2.288461538 Disagree	2.256 Disagree	2.265536723 Disagree
48. I may have shared fake news as a joke or to make fun of others.	2.442307692 Disagree	1.936 Disagree	2.084745763 Disagree
49. I may have shared fake news intentionally to make others believe it.	1.826923077 Disagree	1.456 Strongly Disagree	1.564971751 Strongly Disagree

DISCUSSION

Based on items 1, 2 and 3, although the respondents *agree* that fake news can be spread accidentally by those who think it is true or that fake news is true information taken out of context, they *strongly agree* that fake news is spread intentionally by those who have malicious intentions.

Looking at items 4 – 8, the respondents *strongly agree* that they have encountered fake news in Facebook, in YouTube. They also *agree* that they encountered fake news on TikTok. However, they *disagree* that they have encountered fake news on Twitter and Instagram. It is interesting to note that male and female respondents have varying responses as to whether they have encountered fake news on Youtube and Twitter.

According to the results in items 9, 10 and 11, the respondents *disagree* that having many likes or many comments that agree with the news on social media is basis for believing that the same is real. They however, *strongly disagree* that the number of shares of news on social media is proof that the same is real.

Based on items 12-23, the respondents disagree that they will share news on social media when shared to them by a family member, a relative, a present or former classmate, a friend, a present or former coworker, a teacher, a job superior, a romantic partner, a fellow church member or church leader, a former school mate and a fellow member of an organization to which they belong. Therefore, the direct source or sharer of the social media news does not appear to be an influential factor on whether or not the respondents will share the same.

According to items 24 and 25, the respondents disagree that they will immediately believe a photo and its caption or that a stranger posting news on social media is a real individual.

Looking at items 26 – 39, the results indicate that the respondents *agree* that before they believe any news on social media, they ask themselves whether it is trying to convince them to change their beliefs or behavior, they consider whether the news has eye witnesses, they consider whether experts are

being quoted by the news, they ask themselves whether it was made by a bot, and they ask themselves whether they are biased in favor of the news which might make them believe it even though it is fake.

Furthermore, the respondents *strongly agree* that prior to believing any news on social media, they use search engines to see if other websites are announcing the same news, they make sure that the person is an expert and an authority on the topic of the news, they consider the evidence being presented by the news, they ask themselves whether it was made by a troll, they check whether it is updated news or old news already, they think about whether the news makes sense or is logical and that they go to a "fact checking" website to see if the news is indeed true.

It is interesting to note that for female respondents, statistical data, the possibility of trolls spreading the news and use of fact-checking websites appear to have more weight as their responses to these is "strongly agree" whereas males' response is only "agree."

For items 40 – 46, the respondents *strongly agree* that fake news can harm them, their family, their community, a large sector of society, their country and the world. On the other hand, they *agree* that fake news can only harm those who believe it.

According to items 47, 48 and 49, the respondents *disagree* that they have shared fake news without their knowledge and that they have shared fake news as a joke or to make fun of others. However, they *strongly disagree* that they have shared fake news intentionally to make others believe it. It can be noted that the female respondents *strongly disagree* to having shared fake news intentionally while males only *disagree*.

CONCLUSIONS

The results appear promising in that the respondents of this study appear to be wary of any social media news and therefore, do not immediately believe the same. Perhaps the near recent experience with fake news that spread about COVID-19 has made the respondents adopt a doubtful and more critical attitude toward any news encountered on social media. This assertion is supported by the results in Table 8 that indicate the respondents' universal belief that fake news is harmful.

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